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Bulletin

Title: Foreign Travel Approval Process Amended for All ARS Employees

Number: 98-307A

Date: 9/04/98 **Expiration:** When Rescinded

Originating Office: Travel and Relocation Services Branch, Financial Management Division, AFM/ARS

Distribution: All ARS Employees

This Bulletin is for ARS employees only. It supersedes REE Bulletin 98-307, dated 8/25/98, which announced a change in the foreign travel approval process. The routing of the required documentation for foreign travel approval was changed. An exhibit of suggested responses to questions is included.

A memorandum was issued August 14, 1998, by Secretary Glickman which changes the foreign travel approval process for **all** REE employees. Secretary Glickman now requires that all foreign travel be approved by the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

To implement this new approval process and comply with established time frames for approving foreign travel and, for obtaining country clearances and processing of passports and visas, the following procedures must be followed:

Traveler:

- Prepare the Foreign Travel Justification Form (see Exhibit 1 for guidance).
- Attach a completed, but **not approved**, AD-202, (Type C)TravelAuthorization/Advance.
- Transmit to the Approving Official.

Approving Official:

- Transmit the above documents to the Travel and Relocation Services Branch (TRSB), Financial Management Division (FMD), at the following address:

USDA, ARS, FMD, TRSB
Room 3-2176A
5601 Sunnyside Ave.
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-5114

- Ensure that the endorsement and signature of the Area Director or the appropriate Headquarters official (NPS, OTT, OIRP, etc.) is with the transmitted documentation.

TRSB:

- Perform a quality control review and serve as the control point for all foreign travel approvals under this process. Use a numbering system and ledger to indicate the status of documentation and where the request is in the process.
- Contact or return to traveler if additional information or clarification is needed.
- Transmit to the Administrator, ARS.

- Process necessary country clearance and visa paperwork, **except** for travel to China, Russia and Taiwan.

Administrator:

- Review and, if approved, transmit the Foreign Travel Justification Form with the travel authorization attached, to the Under Secretary, REE.
- **If not approved**, return to TRSB.

Under Secretary, REE:

- Review and, if approved, transmit to the Deputy Secretary, Richard E. Rominger, for review and final approval.
- An information copy will be sent to the Secretary's Chief of Staff at the same time it is submitted to the Deputy Secretary for final approval.

Administrator's Office:

- After the Deputy Secretary has approved the foreign travel, the Administrator's office, will transmit the approved package to TRSB.

TRSB

- Will begin the necessary country clearance and visa process for China, Russia and Taiwan.
- TRSB will notify the appropriate Area Director, or Headquarters staff, who will notify the traveler of the status of their foreign travel.

Subsequently, we received a memorandum dated August 24, 1998, from the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), International Travel Section (ITS), which further informed us that visas would not be requested for those countries requiring submission of the State Department or incoming country clearance, unless a copy of the approved Foreign Travel Justification Form was attached to the request.

As stated in an electronic message forwarded to all employees on September 2, 1998, titled Foreign Travel Policy Update, this was further clarified. **FAS/ITS will continue to process all necessary paperwork for foreign travel. However, a copy of an approved Foreign Travel Justification Form must be forwarded to FAS/ITS before any paperwork for China, Russia, or Taiwan will be processed.**

This new policy is effective **IMMEDIATELY**. Therefore, we offer the following guidance:

- Memoranda seeking approval for foreign travel on or after October 1, 1998, should be forwarded to TRSB no less frequently than biweekly.

NOTE: Current passport and visa processes require 45 to 60 days to complete the processing. Be aware that extra time will be required to obtain the approval of the Deputy Secretary. The Deputy Secretary's approval must be obtained prior to the initiation of State Department clearance or country clearance and submission of visa application for China, Russia and Taiwan. Reservations may be made in advance. However, no purchase approvals associated with any foreign travel may be made, and the Type C travel authorization forms will not be approved prior to the Deputy Secretary's approval.

- Requests for approval of emergency travel situations must state the urgent nature of the travel, should be justified and submitted on a case by case basis, and forwarded as soon as possible for the approval of the Deputy Secretary.

These procedures will not negate the need for ARS foreign travel approvals in the Foreign Travel Information System (FTIS), RMIS, prior to travel. However, it will affect the time necessary to obtain approvals.

We realize the impact this new approval process may have on REE foreign travel, but we are directed by the Secretary of Agriculture and must adhere to this new requirement.

If you have any questions, please contact Linda E. Mahoney, Chief, Travel and Relocation Services Branch, on 301-504-1270, or E-mail at LMahoney@ars.usda.gov.

S. M. HELMRICH
Director
Financial Management Division

Guidance for Completion of the Foreign Travel Justification Form

- Complete one Foreign Travel Justification Form per trip, per traveler.
- Respond to each question briefly, to the point and in first person (i.e., I will). See the suggestions for responses below for each of the five questions.
- Do not attach extraneous material, only submit the Foreign Travel Justification Form and the **unsigned** AD-202.
- If attending an international meeting, conference or similar event, identify the name of the meeting or conference.
- Identify your individual role in attending the event, e.g., invited speaker, organizer, executive secretary, or other.
- If the travel is work-related, identify your role, purpose, and need to travel.
- If all or part of the estimated cost for the trip is being paid with other than USDA funds, indicate, under Estimated Cost on page 1 of the Foreign Travel Justification Form, the total estimated cost of the trip, the ARS cost, and a **brief** explanation of who is paying the remainder of the cost for the trip.

Suggestions for Responses

Question Number

1. Be specific to your area of research.

Examples: - This trip will further the President's initiative with free trade to China.
- This trip will further ARS cooperative research initiatives with other foreign countries. Be specific.

2. Think of USDA as ARS and expand on the response given to question number 1. If attending a meeting, conference, or similar event, identify the name of the event.
3. The response to this question should be yes. Specify how the cost of travel is justified to support your specific area of research or professional development.

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4. Justification should be for you as an individual traveler and why you **need** to perform the foreign travel. If you are aware of other ARS employees traveling you may indicate why it is necessary for others to travel, i.e., because different disciplines of science must be represented. Be as specific as you can. NOTE: Multiple travelers without justification of need is an immediate red flag.
5. Identify who will be acting while you are gone or who specifically will carry on the unit, research lab, center, etc., responsibilities so that it will continue to operate efficiently and effectively during your absence.



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

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FOREIGN TRAVEL JUSTIFICATION FORM
United States Department of Agriculture
Office of the Secretary

All USDA employees who are requesting authorization for foreign travel must complete this form. After providing this information, please attach it to your type-C authorization and submit it to your Under Secretary for approval. This form must accompany the type-C authorization when you submit it to the Deputy Secretary for approval.

I. BACKGROUND

Employee

Title

Agency

Date(s) of Travel and Destinations

Estimated Cost

II. JUSTIFICATION

Please briefly answer each of the following questions in detail. This section is for the Deputy Secretary's approval review process. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

1. How will the trip assist USDA in furthering the President's program and priorities?

2. How will the trip contribute to the USDA mission?
3. Will the result of the trip justify the considerable expense of foreign travel? (For example, will the trip have a significant effect on potential exports or imports of agricultural products?)
4. How many USDA staff will need to travel to support the trip, and why are they needed?
5. How will the traveler ensure the effective management of your mission area or agency should the travel request be approved?

III. AUTHORIZATION

This form must include the signature of the Agency Head/Under Secretary for your division.

Signature - Agency Head

Date

Signature - Under Secretary

Date

IV. DEPUTY SECRETARY'S APPROVAL

Signature

Date